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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT OBAMA'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF A NEW STRATEGY FOR AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN

This cable reports on relevant media reaction from India's English and large non-English press.

SUMMARY: The President's March 27 announcement of the new U.S. strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan received extensive news and editorial coverage in India. The President's remark that the U.S. will not "provide a blank check" was seen as a warning to Islamabad and importantly as a vindication of what India has been saying all along about Pakistan's lack of commitment to meaningful change and to dialogue with India. The Administration's intent to forge an international stakeholders' contact group struck the right chord with editorialists. At the same time, the President's remark that the U.S. must pursue constructive diplomacy with both India and Pakistan was seen as "reminiscent of the Clinton years that dwelt on South Asia as a nuclear flashpoint." END SUMMARY.

¶11. "TARGETING THE REAL PROBLEM," editorial in March 30 Centrist, nationally circulating, pro-Congress Party English daily THE HINDUSTAN TIMES: "There is no greater strategic threat to India than the struggle that today encompasses southern Afghanistan and, increasingly, swathes of northwestern Pakistan.... India is, thus, among the countries that has the greatest stake in the Afghan policy review announced by US President Barack Obama Friday... Much of the policy echoes what India has long argued about Afghanistan. First, the review recognizes that the troubles in Afghanistan and Pakistan are two sides of the same coin. Second, no player in the 'AfPak'

region should assume the US will leave the region in a hurry. Mr. Obama has appeased his party's left by mentioning a 2011 departure date for US troops, but has conditioned it on the elimination of al-Qaeda. Third, the review outlined a stepped-up civilian reconstruction program, having more Afghan hands take over the country's security and broaden Afpak diplomacy to include even non-neighboring States like India and Turkey. This is sensible. Afghanistan is and must be more than a US problem. But ultimately the military and diplomatic burden of stabilizing Afghanistan can only be borne by the US.... The review speaks of increasing aid to Pakistan and encouraging Indo-Pakistan "constructive diplomacy". Indians can take umbrage at one sop to Pakistan - the failure to mention 26/11."

¶2. "OBAMA'S AFPAK STRATEGY," editorial in March 30 Left-influenced, Chennai based, nationally circulating English daily THE HINDU: "With only 4,000 additional American military trainers announced for the ongoing war in Afghanistan but \$7.5 billion for Pakistan over the next five years, President Barack Obama's new AfPak policy seems more about outsource than surge. True, a substantial increase in actual combatants had already been announced by Mr. Obama and his predecessor. But Washington has clearly recognized the limitation of throwing more and more men into the battlefield when their efforts are undermined by the deadly combination of poor governance in Kabul and willful indifference in Islamabad. In his remarks, Mr. Obama noted...that his

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administration was not giving Islamabad a blank cheque.... The Pakistani establishment will have to do more.... Even if there seems to be greater clarity in Washington about where the root of the problem in Afghanistan lies, President Obama's somewhat gratuitous reference to the need to pursue constructive diplomacy with both India and Pakistan suggests the new administration continues to buy the line that the Kashmir issue is somehow constraining Islamabad's ability to do more on the Afghan front.... Internal reform in Pakistan and Afghanistan, coupled with a wider regional approach involving India, Iran, Russia, China, and other players is what will ultimately allow the international community to win what is otherwise a losing military battle in Afghanistan."

¶3. "WAR ON TERROR?" editorial in March 30 Independent, Centrist, nationally circulating English daily THE INDIAN EXPRESS: "The good news from the much touted review, announced by Obama last Friday, comes from his diagnosis of the problem. He has taken on board much of India's own analysis of the challenges confronting the world in the badlands between the Indus and the Hindu Kush. He agrees with India that Pakistan is the source of Afghanistan's insecurity and the world must act together to cure Islamabad of its political malaise. In recognizing that the borderlands between Pakistan and Afghanistan constitute the single most important threat to global peace and security, arguing that Islamabad is part of the problem rather than the solution, and asking India to join an international concert in managing the Aft-Pak region, he has made welcome departures from the American policy towards South Asia since September 11, 2001. The bad news for India, however, comes from the lack of a fundamental change in the operational dynamic of the US strategy towards Pakistan. Cut to the bone, Obama's approach is no different from that of George W. Bush. Obama continues to rely on the Pakistan army to deliver on American and international goals in Afghanistan."

¶4. "MORE DOLLARS FOR PAKISTAN," editorial in March 30 Nationalist, pro-BJP, North India circulating English daily THE PIONEER: "Announced on Friday, March 27, US President Barack Obama's 'comprehensive, new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan' is, broadly speaking, a

pragmatic document. It takes an honest view of the challenges that the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan entail and of the porosity of the border. Crucially, it frees the battle against Al Qaeda and its cohorts from the shackles - political and financial - of the Iraq war.... The promise of aggressively ramping up recruitment and training in the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police is noteworthy. If delivered, it will strengthen the federal Government in Kabul - irrespective of who is President after the Afghan election later this year - and will go a long way in tackling provincial militias, many of them Taliban-related but some only freelance debris of the old Northern Alliance.... There is a strong message for the Pakistani military establishment as well... Notwithstanding some tough talk and subtle semiotics, the fact is the American President still places his faith in the desire and ability of the

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Generals in Rawalpindi to defeat the jihad at their doorstep."

¶5. "OBAMA ON AF-PAK: LET ACTION FOLLOW," editorial in March 29 Centrist, nationally circulated English daily THE ASIAN AGE: "The new US strategy for the Afghanistan-Pakistan region...has little new to say on some of the key problems that have dogged the western effort in bringing peace to the AfPak sector.... The new American leader does not wish to be in the position of having to write blank cherubs, as was the case earlier. The \$1.5 billion to be given annually to Islamabad for the next five years will be contingent on showing results. Much of this is old hat, really. Washington's weariness with Islamabad's double-dealing goes back some years, but the US vision, such as it is, makes it impossible for it to stop incentivising the Pakistani military. That really is the fundamental problem in the US approach to the problem, although America is not about to acknowledge this. The American leader has spoken of getting started a UN Contact Group on Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is an important step at the level of thought.... The second conceptual break is with regard to involving regional countries in helping to solve the terrorism/ Taliban/ Al Qaeda problem that has come to threaten regional and international security. Thus, Iran, China, Russia, and India now get an official look-in."

¶6. "FROM DE-HYPHENATION TO DUAL-HYPHENATION," op-ed by Nationalist strategic affairs editor Siddharth Varadarajan in March 30 Left-influenced English daily THE HINDU: "Whether valid or not, the Obama administration and the rest of the world see a link between Afghanistan and the India-Pakistan relationship. This is a problem New Delhi must address. Just as they were celebrating the end of their own hyphenation with Pakistan and the rise of a new geolexical construct, 'AfPak', Indian policymakers find themselves staring down the barrel of 'dual hyphenation' - the link the Obama administration is making between the ongoing military instability on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and the unsettled relationship between New Delhi and Islamabad.... If dual hyphenation is a bitter pill for the Indian establishment to swallow, there are elements of the new strategy which might also provide it comfort. For one, the emphasis on accountability on the Pakistani side for the enhanced aid being promised.... The Obama administration may not be off the mark in seeing a link between 'AfPak' and 'IndoPak' but it is looking at the wrong end of the map. Regardless of whether a settlement is reached in Kashmir, the Pakistani military looks at the roads and hospitals and training that India is providing in Afghanistan as New Delhi's cultivation of "strategic depth."

¶7. "OBAMA'S ANTI-TERROR POLICY: PAKISTAN WILL HAVE TO SHOW RESULTS," editorial in March 30 Centrist, North Indian English daily THE TRIBUNE: "US President Barack

Obama is ready with his strategy to fight to the finish Al-Qaida, the Taliban and the terrorist outfits associated with them. The contours of the anti-terrorism drive he unveiled on Friday shows a departure from the

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policy pursued by the previous administration under Mr. George W. Bush. The US will not hesitate in taking the help of the countries in the region, including India and Iran. The Obama administration will provide massive financial and other kinds of assistance to Pakistan, where most of the terrorist masterminds are believed to be hiding, but not without strings attached.... The US will have to force Pakistan to abandon its policy of entering into any kind of deals with terrorists and extremists. The ISI must be made to delink itself from the terrorist outfits it created or nurtured at different stages."

¶8. "OBAMA AFGHAN APPEAL TO INDIA," analysis in March 28 Centrist, East India circulating THE TELEGRAPH: "In part this was an appeal to his trans-Atlantic European partners intended at shaming them into contributing more in the Afghan effort. And in part, this was also a plea to India, China, Russia, the Central Asian countries and, significantly, to Iran, to get involved in Afghanistan. But above all, Obama's strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan is not open-ended unlike George W. Bush's... The appeal does not mean that there will be Indian boots on the ground in Afghanistan...but a larger exposure of India in Afghanistan is likely to follow despite Pakistani objections if the US follows through on the suspicions of... Richard Holbrooke that the Taliban leadership is sheltered around Quetta in Pakistan. A huge departure from Bush's policy is the major role Obama is assigning to the UN."

¶9. "OBAMA'S WAR FOCUS NOW ON PAKISTAN," editorial in March 30 Centrist, nationally circulating English daily MAIL TODAY: "US President Barack Obama's comprehensive new strategy to fight the war in Afghanistan has just got a new target - Pakistan. Almost all the significant action points he outlined in his address on Friday morning related to that country. That is inevitable considering the American assessment that the Al- Qaeda leadership - Osama bin Laden and Ayman al- Zawahiri are almost certainly hiding in areas of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan.... Islamabad was compensated handsomely for its duplicity. It got massive US military and economic assistance and was reimbursed in cash for expenses for undertaking operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. But now Mr. Obama has made it clear that Pakistan can no longer have this 'blank check'. This is Pakistan's last chance. We can only hope that this realization has dawned in the capital Islamabad, as well as Rawalpindi where the Army is headquartered."

¶10. "POLICY REBOOT," op-ed article by strategic affairs analyst C Uday Bhaskar in the March 30 Centrist Mumbai-based English language daily DNA: "The more significant part of the Obama speech is that it provides some degree of clarity about US aims and objectives in the Bush led global war on terror after 9/11.... There are two references to India in the Obama speech -- one in relation to the familiar 'South Asian nuclear neighbors' and the other about including India in the Contact Group for Aft-Pak. While the former formulation is reminiscent of the Clinton years that dwelt on South Asia as a

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nuclear flashpoint and caused some dismay in India, the unstated linkage should be monitored in the months ahead. The Pak military has long sought to link regional nuclear stability, Kashmir and the terrorism phenomenon, which India has sought to refute.... This will pose a

challenge to India and here India's inclusion in the Contact Group offers valuable possibilities. Pakistan is at the core of the current challenge to regional and global stability and it is encouraging that the Obama speech recognizes this. But a new policy is a work in progress and must be monitored objectively and dispassionately."

¶11. "AMERICA'S DILEMMA," editorial in March 29 right-of-center, nationally circulating and widely read DAINIK JAGRAN Hindi daily: "Announcing a new strategy for the Aft-Pak region, President Barack Obama Friday announced plans to provide Pakistan \$1.5 billion non-military aid annually for the next five years. It is clear that the U.S. does not know what to do with this country, which has become a den of terrorists. What an irony for the U.S. that it has to pay a country it does not trust! Obama's statement that the U.S. will not provide a blank check clearly indicates that he does not believe that Pakistan has been entirely honest. If Obama's administration fails to understand the nexus between official Pakistani elements and terrorists, then it will make the same mistake as the Bush Administration. How can Pakistan help the U.S. in Afghanistan when it can't fight terror on its own soil? Instead of chasing Al Qaeda and Taliban only, America has to also focus on outfits like Jaish and Lashkar who target India."

¶12. "OBAMA'S INITIATIVE," editorial in March 30 Centrist, North Indian, Pro-Congress Party DAINIK HINDUSTAN Hindi daily: "During his election campaign Barack Obama said that Pakistan was misusing American aid and needs to be more accountable. Announcing the U.S. administration's new strategy for the Afghanistan-Pakistan region on Friday, President Obama said the U.S. will not provide a blank cheque to Pakistan any longer. Obama's strategy clearly shows that the U.S. now sees Pakistan as a part of the problem and wishes to see the world unite to solve the problem.... It is admirable that Obama is thinking of including the rest of the world in finding a solution to the Aft-Pak problem. There is no doubt that the United States will now have to think global, and think long-term.... For a long-term solution of the Aft-Pak problem, the U.S. will have to work toward strengthening democracy in Paistan. As for India, it has an important role to play in resolving the Aft-Pak problem. It is the only big country in the region that is interested in seeing this problem solved."

¶13. "AMERICA WILL NOW CORNER PAKISTAN TO GET TO THE TALIBAN" editorial in the March 28 Centrist Gujarati daily DIVYA BHASKAR. "The way the Taliban are advancing in Pakistan poses a serious threat to India's security as well. Even a superpower like America has now realized how Herculean is the task of confronting Taliban and Al Qaeda.... Obama's utterances are a wake-up call for

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Pakistan. Now Pakistan will have to prove that it is not sheltering terrorists and extremists and will have to come clean on its intentions in the war against terrorism. President Obama's straightforward approach indicates the U.S. favors measures to rein in Pakistan and make it accountable."

¶14. "PROBLEM AT THE ROOTS," editorial in March 30 Independent Bengali daily ANANDABAZAR PATRIKA: "How will the jihad extremists be contained by supplying more arms and providing more financial assistance to Pakistan? There is an established tradition of both these components being continually smuggled to extremists since the era of Russian occupation. So, the success of the Obama Administration's Aft-Pak policy remains doubtful."

¶15. "PRESIDENT OBAMA & THE WAR ON TERROR", editorial in March 29 right-of-center, south Indian Urdu daily MUNSIF:

"President Obama has spelled out his new policy for Afghanistan. This policy also includes Pakistan, since annual aid is to be given to Pakistan. However, the aid comes with a dash of warning that if Pakistan does not eliminate the menace of terrorism and the breeding ground of terrorists on its soil, this task shall be taken up by none other than United States itself. In a nutshell, Obama has actually toed the line of former President Bush to continue with the global war on terror. Despite everything, the world is still prepared to accept the supremacy of America. For some, it seems to be a matter of prestige to line up with America in its war on terror, although this so-called war on terror is actually a war against the Islamic world."

¶16. "AID TO PAKISTAN", editorial in March 29 right-of-center, Hyderabad Urdu daily SIASAT: "President Barack Obama has clearly spelled out his views towards the two most significant nations of the subcontinent - India & Pakistan. Since he came to power, Obama has been taking all steps very cautiously. Irrespective of his stand as far as Pakistan is concerned, the policies with respect to Afghanistan appear to be set on terra firma. He revealed that a comprehensive plan of action will be prepared in the context of Afghanistan and Pakistan. India has always stood against terrorism prevalent in both Afghanistan & Pakistan. That is perhaps why Obama has included India in its special group as an ally in the subcontinent. President Obama has been taking effective steps in the right direction to make a world free of terrorism, since day one. It is hoped that his plans & policies will bear fruit."

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